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RESPECTING, CHIEFLY,
THE ADMINISTRATION OF BAPTISM, THE
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BY THE LATE
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Vicar of MARTHAM, NORFOLK.

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LETTER I.

ON BAPTISM.

DEAR SIR,

I AM ready to give you my thoughts on any subject, the knowledge of which may contribute to your ease or usefulness, as a minister. To go over the whole plan of discipline in the church of England, would be to engage in a most arduous undertaking. It would be also unnecessary, as, by far the greater

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part of it has little or no connection with your present circumstances. If, I mistake not, your difficulties are confined to three articles:—the administration of baptism; of the Lord's supper; and the preparation of children for confirmation.—I do not wonder, that, in the performance of this part of your duty, you meet with several disagreeable things. Others, before you, have met with the like: and, perhaps, there is no conscientious minister, who is wholly unacquainted with them. To see persons, who are ignorant of Christianity, grossly immoral in their lives, and enemies to real religion, offer themselves as sureties for the religious education of children—to hear them declare, in the presence of a congregation assembled for the worship of God, that they renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world; that they keep God's holy word and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their lives; and yet, at the same time, discover a gross ignorance of his will, and an irreverence for his ordinances;—to see one of this sort offer himself at the Lord's supper, ready to eat and drink to
his

his own condemnation;—to hear him pretending to a right to the ordinances, and threatening the officiating minister, if he will not admit him to partake of it,—must be very painful to a serious mind. I do not wonder at your uneasiness. To palliate such enormities, or prevent their happening often, would be very desirable: to be able to put a stop to them, would be a matter of thanksgiving. What remedy the law has provided we may enquire.

In this our enquiry, the rubrics and canons must be our chief, though not our only guide. We may avail ourselves of all the parts of the avowed standard of the doctrine and discipline of the church of England: and we may find, that, in several cases, they will elucidate them. But, to avoid confusion, I will speak to each of the three articles separately. And first of

BAPTISM.

It is remarkable that the church lays great stress on the celebration of this ordinance; requiring that previous notice shall be given to the minister, and holding out to him a penalty of suspension from his office, for three months, in case he shall refuse to perform it.

Canon 68. " No minister shall refuse or delay to christen any child according to the Book of Common Prayer, that is brought to the church to him upon Sundays and holy-days to be christened (convenient warning being given him thereof before :) and if he shall refuse so to do, he shall be suspended by the bishop of the diocese, from his ministry, by the space of six months."

3d Rubric. " When there are children to be baptized, the parents shall give knowledge thereof over-night, or in the morning, before the beginning of morning prayer, to the curate."

5th Rubric. " And the god-fathers and god-mothers, and the people with the children, must be ready at the font, either immediately after the last lesson at morning prayer, as the curate by his direction shall appoint."

What is generally thought proper notice is that mentioned in the third Rubric; viz. that notice shall be given to the minister over-night, or in the morning before the beginning of morning prayer. The rubric, however, is so expressed, that a person inclined to give uneasiness

easiness to a minister (and many such are to be found) may use it very conveniently for that purpose. The terms *over-night* and *in the morning before morning prayer*, are of great latitude. The former comprehends every minute from sun-setting to midnight; the latter, all the time from midnight till the minister begins the morning service. And, therefore, under pretence of giving notice that his child is to be baptized, a person may disturb a minister in his retirement; or when he is in bed; at any time of the usual hours of sleep; or he may stop him in the church-yard, as he is going to church; or when he is going into the reading-desk; or when he is in it, if he has not begun the appointed service: and yet it is generally thought, that to give notice, according to the literal sense of the rubric, either “*over-night, or in the morning before the beginning of morning prayer,*” is sufficient; is all that is necessary; all that the law requires: and that, if a clergyman has such notice given him, and refuses to baptize a child, he is punishable, liable to be suspended from his ministry for three months.

The 68th Canon, which holds out the penalty of suspension, is more pertinent, and not so open to abuse, though it admits of considerable latitude. It says, "Convenient warning" shall be given. Now, as it may often happen, that notice shall be given a little while, or an hour or two, before the morning service; and yet the minister may not have convenient warning. It may often happen, that notice shall be given him over-night, or early in the evening of the preceding day; and yet he may not have convenient warning. The expression certainly implies this, that he shall have sufficient time to do all that is necessary, in order to celebrate the ordinance according to the law; and that he shall have time to do all this, without putting off or retarding any public service. To mention only one case, and which in villages may frequently happen: Supposing, upon notice being given him over-night, it should appear that the intended sponsors were all strangers to him; that they lived at some distance, and were not expected at the parents' house, till within half an hour of the appointed time for the morning service; how could he possibly

possibly satisfy himself before the morning service, that the persons provided were such as the 29th Canon requires? It is plain, then, that notice might be given him over-night, and yet it would not be "convenient warning." And hence it is evident, that a process against a clergyman for refusing to baptize a child, notice having been given him according to the rubric, would be without a well-grounded hope of success, unless it could be proved that such notice was convenient warning. To the article of notice we may add this: that convenient notice, or warning having been given, "the sponsors, and the persons with the child, shall be ready at the font, immediately after the second lesson of the morning or evening service, as the curate, at his discretion, shall appoint." This is the language of the fifth rubric. The curate then has a discretionary power, which he may so use, as to celebrate the ordinance at the morning or afternoon service, according to his pleasure. Hence, it seems plain, that parents, or their agent, have no right to bring an unbaptized infant to church, under a pretence of having it baptized, without the order of the curate. Besides

rides, infants cannot be managed so as to prevent their cries ; and their cries may disturb the congregation. And if the curate will not baptize it, at the usual time, assured that proper notice has not been given him, and that they who brought it are actuated by an improper temper, the minds of the people may be unhinged, and their attention drawn from the public service. And yet several bring an infant to church without giving proper or any notice ; some, from a determination to force the minister to celebrate the ordinance when they please ; others, from a persuasion that if a child is brought to church, the minister cannot refuse to baptize it. Such persons, undoubtedly, act without any warrant from law or reason : and though, perhaps, there is no positive law to punish them for bringing a child to church without the order of the minister, yet they are certainly reprehensible, and answerable for the consequences of such behaviour ; and ought to be considered and treated as disturbers of the congregation.

We see, then, the law commands, that, before a child is brought to be baptized, notice shall

shall be given to the minister, and not merely notice over-night, or the next morning, before the morning service, but such as may properly be called convenient warning, time enough to enable him to adjust every thing that the law demands, in order to a proper celebration of the ordinance. If he has not this, he has not convenient warning; nor can he justly be considered and treated as a transgressor of the canon, or even as culpable, though he should absolutely refuse to baptize a child that is even brought to the church at the usual time.

We may now enquire why notice, or convenient warning, that a child is to be baptized, is commanded to be given to the minister. One reason, no doubt, is, that he may take care that such sponsors are provided as the 29th canon requires.

The 29th Canon. "No parent shall be urged to be present, nor be admitted to answer as god-father for his own child; not any god-father or god-mother shall be suffered to make any other answer or speech, than by the Book of Common Prayer is prescribed in that behalf. Neither shall any person be admitted god-father
or

or god-mother, to any child at christening or confirmation, before the said person so undertaking hath received the holy communion."

In this canon the wisdom of our church is evident, in guarding against the profanation of this ordination, by not admitting all persons, indiscriminately, to stand as sponsors. She declares that none shall be admitted but persons who have received the holy communion; intimating, without question, that as they who undertake the office of sponsors, undertake an office for which they are responsible both to God and man; so none should be admitted to undertake it, but such as may be supposed to see the office in this light. And as persons who have presented themselves at the Lord's table, may be supposed to have thought seriously upon the commands of Christ, and to act conscientiously, so such only may be considered as proper to undertake the office of sponsors.

Here then we have firm ground to stand on. A minister can oblige parents to give him previous notice concerning the baptism of a child; such notice as may, in strict propriety, be called convenient warning: he has it in his power to appoint

appoint the time for the celebration of the ordinance, either at the morning or the afternoon service; and they have no right to bring the child to church without his direction: and to prevent, in some measure, what may occasion the greatest abuse, he can refuse all persons from standing as sponsors, who have not received the holy communion. And if he acts firmly, according to these particulars which the law directs, he may, no doubt, give a considerable check to that gross profanation of the ordinance, which every conscientious minister cannot but see and lament.

But you'll be ready to say, the remedy is almost as bad as the disease. Many, I believe, would think so: for, considering the general practice, he must expect much and violent opposition, if he uses it. You know, that in most places, perhaps in nineteen out of twenty, no notice is given to the minister concerning the baptism of a child, unless by the clerk of the parish; and by him, in general, just before the minister begins the service; or, perhaps, not till the second lesson is finished. You know that parents send their children to be baptized
when

when they please, without waiting for the appointment of the minister, whether they shall be brought at the morning or afternoon's service. You know, also, that very few ministers make any enquiry, whether they who offer themselves as sponsors, have received the holy communion. This is the general practice. The people are confirmed in it; and it must be very agreeable to them, because it suffers them to act as they please, with regard to the baptism of their children. It has, moreover, been continued so long, that they think they have a right to act thus: and I have known that, when a minister has deviated in the least particular from this general practice, they have complained of ill usage, and talked clamourously of being deprived of their rights. Opposition from the people may therefore be expected. It may be expected, likewise, from the neighbouring clergy. For, if the minister's practice, who acts according to the rubric and canons, is right, and there can be no difficulty in proving it to be so, theirs must be wrong. The canons and rubrics are the rule, and the only one, by which both minister and people are to act in such

such cases. Every clergyman is bound by law to act in this manner. If he acts otherwise, he transgresses the law, confirms the people in error, and is punishable. By his conduct he makes light of the ordinance, and opens a door to the people to profane it at their pleasure.

You are brought then to this dilemma; either to be governed by the canons and rubrics; that is, to do your duty, and wait for opposition from prejudiced unthinking persons; or to comply with the general practice; that is, to do what you know to be wrong, and purchase outward peace at the expence of conscience. In the former cases you may avoid some very disagreeable things, but must give up every hope of a reformation. Your compliance will tend to confirm your people in their prejudices and prophaness, and you cannot have inward peace. Think then seriously of these things, make up your mind about them, and determine to act accordingly.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

ON BAPTISM.

THE clergyman who acts with firmness, according to the direction of the rubrics, the 29th and 68th canons, may, no doubt, prevent much evil, which would otherwise take place, in the celebration of the ordinance of baptism; but his power, I apprehend, is not limited by these. It may be found, upon enquiry, that other rules, of as much, or more importance than these, have been given up through neglect and undue compliance. If a minister is to have notice given him of the baptism of a child, only that he may enquire, whether they who offer themselves as sponsors, have received the holy communion; then if parents give him convenient warning, and provide such sponsors

as the 29th canon requires, he is absolutely obliged to baptize the child; his refusal is reprehensible, and punishable. But this is to suppose that parents have an unconditional right to have their children baptized, whether they understand the doctrines of the church or not; whether they profess them or not; whether they statedly attend the public worship in their parish church, or keep entirely from it; or whether they live in the fear of God, or quite unconcerned about religion, or even in a state of profligacy.

In order to come to a certainty in this point, it may be necessary to consider on what ground the right of an infant to baptism is founded.

Article the 27th says, "The baptism of young children is in anywise to be retained in the church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ." That the expression, "in anywise," is not to be understood, as having the same meaning with "absolutely," or, "unconditionally," will, I think, soon appear. In the service for baptism, the expression of our Lord, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," is used as implying the lawfulness

of admitting infants to baptism; but not as giving them an unconditional right to it.

In the public Catechism we have the following questions and answers:

Q. What is required of persons to be baptized?

A. Repentance, whereby they forsake sin; and faith, whereby they stedfastly believe the promises of God made to them in that sacrament.

Q. Why then are infants baptized, when by reason of their tender age they cannot perform them?

A. Because they promise them both by their sureties; which promise, when they come to age, themselves are bound to perform.

Here the church of England plainly acknowledges, that children have not an unconditional, or absolute right to baptism; that the reason why they are admitted, or their right, is founded on the promise they make by their sureties. Repentance and faith are necessary to baptism; but though infants cannot perform them, on account of their tender age; yet as their sureties promise, in their name, that they shall repent and believe, there-

therefore they are baptized. Here we may observe, that if these words are to be understood according to their obvious meaning, the right of infants to baptism is founded on an absolute impossibility, viz. on the promise of their sureties, that they shall repent and believe; for no man has it in his power to enable another to repent and believe, to the salvation of his soul. Repentance and faith are both the gift of God. If it be said, their real meaning is, when infants are capable of being taught, they shall be taught that they are bound to repent and believe.—Not to remark that this is, by no means, consistent with the first question and answer, and absolutely inconsistent with the obvious sense of the second.—We may ask, Is this account of the right of infants to baptism, at all agreeable to the word of God? Is it any where said, or even hinted, that infants have a right to baptism, because their sureties promise that they shall repent and believe? this cannot be; for sureties are not of divine institution; and though their office is very ancient, charitable, and may answer some valuable purposes, it was not used in the Christian church, 'till more than an hundred

dred years after Christ. Why these expressions were admitted, and have been continued in our public Catechism, to this day, is to me altogether unaccountable.

One of the rubrics, however, may lead us to a different view of this matter: "The curates of every parish shall often admonish the people, that they defer not the baptism of their children, longer than the 1st or 2d Sunday next after their birth, or other holy-day following between; unless upon a great and seasonable cause, to be approved by the curate." This seems to allude to the time of circumcising infants; and to imply, that as children were, by the command of God, circumcised on the eighth day, so infants should be baptized as nearly to the eighth day as may be. It seems also an acknowledgment that baptism was ordained in the room of circumcision. These circumstances point out the real opinion of the church concerning the right of infants to baptism, much plainer than any thing she has said in any of her public offices. And it is this: They have the same right to baptism, that infants, under the Old Testament-dispensation, had to be circumcised,
and

and infants, in the times of the Apostles, had to be baptized. Now it is demonstrable, that, in either of these times, the infant had no right in himself; in the former, to circumcision; in the latter, to baptism. His right was founded upon his being the seed of a believing parent. Under the Jewish dispensation, no child was admitted to be circumcised, whose parents did not acknowledge Jehovah to be the God of Israel, whose father had not been circumcised himself, and who did not engage to walk according to his law. In the times of the Apostles, no child was admitted to baptism, one, at least, of whose parents did not believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God, and that there is salvation in no other. The promise to Abraham, at the institution of circumcision, was (Gen. ch. 17) "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." Agreeable to this, the declaration of Peter, on the day of pentecost, to those who, "were pricked in their heart," is, "Repent, and be baptized, every

every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children."—Acts chap. ii. Accordingly, the Apostle Paul says, "the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else, were your children unclean, but now are they holy." 1 Cor. vii. 14. *Holy*, as being dedicated to God, at baptism. For it is well known, that all persons and things that were dedicated to the service of God, even the vessels of the sanctuary, were said to be holy. *Holy*, as being the seed of a believing parent, and therefore having a right to baptism, or to be dedicated to the service of God in that ordinance.

If then this is the doctrine of the church of England, and we must admit that it is, as will soon appear, unless we will suppose, that she entertains opinions which are absolutely absurd and indefensible; it follows, that no child has a right to baptism, one of whose parents is not a believer.

But, it may be asked, in what sense does she understand the word Believer? To this question,

tion, I acknowledge, it is very difficult, if possible, to give a determinate answer.

Not to insist on the scriptural distinctions of a living and a dead faith; of the faith of devils, and of believing to the salvation of the soul; not to dwell much, on those pertinent, yet awful distinctions; "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith, which worketh by love. In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God."—Tho' towards a solution of the question before us, they ought, in some measure, to be regarded, I think she does not suppose any one to be a believer, who does not understand the doctrines contained in her articles—who does not believe them to be agreeable to the word of God—who does not stately attend on the worship of God—and whose life and conversation, are not, at least, moral and decent.

This, I apprehend, is the lowest sense in which she can be imagined to understand the word Believer.

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I do not take upon me to say, that this is her precise meaning, but that she cannot be thought to mean less than this. I am persuaded the times have been, when her rulers and ministers would, without hesitation, have declared that she meant much more; and I know that a discipline was then used, conformable to a more noble idea of the word. But keeping to this low idea of the word, let us see what will follow: There will be a number of necessary consequences, sufficient to surprize many, and to alarm more. It will follow,

1. That no child, one, at least, of whose parents does not answer to this idea of the word, Believer, has any right to baptism.

2. That the child has no right—where both the parents are ignorant of the leading doctrines of the church.

3. That the child has no right—if both the parents are opposers, or railers against the doctrines of the church.

4. That the child has no right—if both the parents profess salvation by works; though they may stately attend the worship of God, in their parish church, and be moral in their lives and

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conversation : for this is to profess a way of salvation in direct opposition to what the church professes; and therefore they do not believe in her articles.

5. That the child has no right—if both the parents live unconcerned about their future state.

6. That the child has no right—if both the parents live openly in a state of profligacy.

These are undeniable conclusions from the above-mentioned definition of the word, Believer. I could easily add more, but these are sufficient for my present purpose, viz. to shew, that the order for “convenient warning” to be given to a minister before the baptizing of a child, was for other purposes than merely to let him know when he went into the church, or when the second lesson was ended, that there was to be a christening; or, to give him time to enquire, whether the intended sponsors had been partakers of the holy communion. It was originally, no doubt, that he might enquire, whether one or both the parents of the child were Believers, in that sense of the word, which the church affixed to it. For if the church avowed, that

that none but the child of a Believer or Believers, in her sense of the word, had a right to baptism; she, by the same avowal, declared that the child, one or both of whose parents were not Believers, in her sense of the word, had no right to baptism, and therefore ought not to be baptized; and consequently, that enquiry, concerning this point, ought to be made.

If all this is true, and I see not that any thing solid can be objected to it, then what numbers of infants are admitted to baptism, in the church of England, who certainly have no right to it? How often is this ordinance profaned by parents and sponsors! and this profaneness encouraged by ministers!

But, if this is not the doctrine of the church of England, I must freely own, I can see no reason why she admits children to baptism except on this account. Parents, living in any parish, have a right to have their children baptized in the church of the parish, where they live; because they live in that parish. And, because they live in that parish, can oblige the minister of that parish to baptize them; and the grossest ignorance of the Christian religion, or the most evil

evil dispositions in the parents, shall not be admitted as a sufficient reason, why he should not baptize them. And, indeed, this seems to be the general opinion, founded on the general practice.

But who will be so hardy as to defend this on any principles whatever? Is it agreeable to law, to reason, to the practice of the primitive times, to Scripture? Certainly not. Does the church of England herself, any where plainly, or by clear deduction, assert this? I think no one would undertake to point it out. I am sure, if she does, her opinion in this particular has escaped my frequent and anxious enquiry to ascertain it. And yet, as I observed, this is the general belief, founded on the general practice. Hence parents, grossly ignorant of the principles of Christianity, unconcerned about them, and habitually engaged in a profligate way of life, will offer their children to be baptized, and bring for sponsors, persons like themselves: and if the minister hesitates about performing the service, will be clamorous, insist on his doing it, and threaten him with complaints and punishment, in case of his refusal,

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or even delay. Would such conduct have been suffered in the primitive times? at the time of the reformation in these kingdoms? or, would it be suffered in any church where discipline is observed? I am persuaded it would have been thought sufficient for delaying, if not for setting aside, the baptism of the children of such parents. But, to confirm my opinion, and shew that I have not mistaken, or misrepresented the doctrine of the church of England, I will produce several passages from some of the earliest and best writers she has produced: writers who were considered among her brightest ornaments; who were engaged in the defence of her standard doctrines, who may, therefore, be supposed to have understood, and faithfully represented them.

- JEWEL, Bishop of Salisbury, was born in 1522, and died in 1571. In his Treatise of the Sacraments, (Works, p. 265.) he says, "For this cause, infants are baptised, because they are born in sin, and cannot become spiritual, but by this new birth of the water and the spirit. They are the heirs of the promise; the covenant of God's favour is made unto them." God said
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to Abraham "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." Therefore, saith the Apostle, if the root be holy, so are the branches. Rom. ch. xi. And again, "the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy." 1 Cor. ch. vii. When the disciples rebuked those who brought little children to Christ, that he might touch them, he said "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Mark ch. x. And again, "Their angels always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." Mat. ch. x. The kingdom of heaven is of such, saith Christ; not only then of those, but of other like infants which shall be at all times.

As God took the seed of Abraham to be partakers of the covenant which he gave to Abraham, so he appointed that every man-child of eight days old should be circumcised. And

Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Gen. ch. xxi. May we think that the promise of God hath an end, so that it reacheth not to our children? or might the children of the Jews receive the sign of the covenant, and not the children of the Christians? Whatsoever was promised unto Abraham, the same is also performed unto us. We enjoy the same blessings and free privileges of God's favour. St. Paul, to the Galatians, saith, "Know ye, that they which are of faith, are the children of Abraham." Again, "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs by promise." Gal. ch. iii.

Now, is the sign of the covenant also changed, and baptism is instead of circumcision, as St. Paul saith, and calleth them circumcised which are baptized. "In whom (meaning Christ) also ye are circumcised, with circumcision made without hands, by putting off the sinful body of the flesh, through the circumcision of Christ, in that you are buried with him through baptism." Col. ch. ii.

And as the children of the faithful, by right, ought to be baptized; so such others also as
were

were born of unbelieving parents, and were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and were strangers from the covenant of promise; and had no hope," if they acknowledge the error in which they lived, and seek the forgiveness of their former sins, may well receive this sacrament. So when they which heard Peter were "pricked in their hearts, and said to Peter and the other Apostles, Men, and brethren, what shall we do? Peter said unto them; Amend your lives, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." They were buried with Christ by baptism, into his death, and made partakers of his blood, and continued in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship. Acts ch. ii.

Thus far Bishop Jewel.—I shall make but one remark on this great and good man's testimony. It is this—that he plainly confirms the right of children to baptism, to their being the seed of believing parents.

Dr. FULKE was born about the year 1539, and died Master of Pembroke-hall, in Cambridge, in 1589. He published several works in divinity, which were greatly esteemed. His

chief work was his "Confutation of the Rhenish Testament," which was published in 1580, and, though a large folio, was reprinted in 1601.

The Rhenish Jesuits (on Rom. v. 10.) charge the Calvinistic Protestants with affirming, that Christian men's children are holy from their mother's womb. To which the Doctor answers, "We do none otherwise affirm Christian men's children to be holy from their mother's womb, than St. Paul, (1 Cor. vii. 14.) saith, They are holy, because they are comprized in God's covenant, and have a right to be baptized."

The Rhenish Jesuits, in their Annotations on 1 Cor. vii. 14. repeat the same charge against the Calvinistic Protestants, with this addition, "that therefore they need not baptism." To this Dr. Fulke replies, It is an impudent slander that the Calvinists hold Christian men's children to be so holy from their mother's womb, that they need not baptism. For Calvin clean contrarywise doth argue against the Anabaptists upon St. Paul's words: "They are holy, therefore they are to be baptized." And the sacrament

ment is not to be denied unto them that are therefore called holy, because they are comprehended in God's covenant; where he saith, I will be thy God, and the God of thy seed after thee. Gen. xvii. 7.

Mr. PERKINS was born in 1558, and died in 1602. Tho' he did not compleat his 44th year, he was indisputably, whether for systematic, polemic, casuistical, or practical divinity, the first divine that England produced in the whole sixteenth century. The last and best edition of his works, was given to the public in the year 1631, in three volumes folio.

In his Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, (vol. ii, p. 263. edit. 1631.) he says, "The second circumstance is concerning the persons to be baptized, and they are all such as be in covenant, in likelihood, or in the judgment of charity. And they are of two sorts; men of years, and infants.

Men of years that join themselves unto the true church, are to be baptized; yet before their baptism, they are to make confession of their faith, and to promise amendment of life. Acts ch. ii. 38. ch. x. 38. And thus, places of Scripture,

ture that require actual faith and amendment of life, in them that are baptized, are to be understood of men of years.

Infants of believing parents are likewise to be baptized. The grounds of their baptism are these:—First, the commandment of God, Matt. xxviii. 18. “Baptize all nations, &c.” in which words the baptism of infants is prescribed. For the Apostles, by virtue of this commission, baptized whole families. Acts xvi. 15, and 33. Again, circumcision of infants was commanded by God. Gen. xvii. 14. and baptism, in the New Testament, succeeds in the room of circumcision. Coloss. ii. 11. Therefore baptism of infants is likewise commanded. The second ground is this: Infants of believing parents are in the covenant of grace; for this is the tenor of the covenant; I will be thy God, and the God of thy seed.” Gen. xvii. 7. It may be said, that this promise was made, in this sort, only to Abraham, because he was to be the father of the faithful. *Ans.* It pertains to all believing parents. Exodus xx. God promises to shew mercy to thousands of them that love him. Acts ii. 39. Peter saith to the
Jews

Jews that heard him preach, The promises belong to you and to your children. Paul saith, If the parents believe, the children are holy. 1 Cor. vii. 14. If holy, then are they in the covenant. Now then, because infants are in the covenant, they are to be baptized. For this is the reason of St. Peter : To whom the promises belong, to them belongeth baptism ; but to you and your children belong the promises ; therefore, you and your children, are to be baptized. Acts ii. 38.

In the same page he says, " It may be demanded, whether the children of Turks and Jews are to be baptized ? *Ans.* No : because the parents are forth of the covenant.

In the next page he has another question and answer, to which it may be proper to attend.

It may be demanded, whether the children of wicked Christians, *i. e.* of such as hold in judgment true religion, and deny it in their lives, may be baptized ? *Ans.* they may ; for all without exception, that were born of circumcised Jews, whereof many were wicked, were circumcised.

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Thus far Mr. Perkins.—We may now observe, that these three divines all agree in this opinion; that the right of infants to baptism, is founded on their being the seed of believing parents; that the parents being in covenant with God, by faith, they are considered as being in the same covenant with their believing parents, and therefore have a right to baptism, which is the seal of the covenant.

These persons who thus agree, lived when the articles, the public standard of the doctrines of the church of England, were first agreed upon in convocation (in 1562,) and when they received the sanction of Parliament (in 1571,) when discipline was observed, and uniformity in doctrine strictly regarded. We may then safely conclude, that what they say on this subject, was the received doctrine of the church.

To these we may add the very respectable names of several of their successors, who were all in the same sentiment: Bishops Taylor, Hall, Sanderson, Dr. Hammond, Archbishop Usher, Bishops Reynolds, Hopkins, Ball, and Beveridge, with many others, who were eminent in their day.

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I observe further, that I do not recollect to have read, or heard, that any one ever publicly declared, that this was not the doctrine of the church of England.

Let us now take notice of the two remarkable questions and answers of Mr. Perkins.

“ It may be demanded, whether the children of Turks and Jews are to be baprized? *Ans.* No; because the parents are forth (or out) of the covenant.”

The Turk believes that salvation is to be had through Mahomet, but not through Jesus Christ. The Jew believes that he can be saved through Moses, to the exclusion of Jesus Christ as a Saviour. And if these are out of the covenant, according to Mr. Perkins, is it not because they do not rely on the promises of God through Jesus Christ? Is not then every person out of the covenant, who does not expect, or seek, salvation through Jesus Christ? Is not every parent then out of the covenant who does not expect, or seek, salvation through Jesus Christ? Is not then every person out of the covenant who expects pardon and peace with God, for works of righteousness which he thinks
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he has done, or can do? Is not then every parent out of the covenant who is ignorant of Christianity, and unconcerned about all religion? What covenant can he possibly be in, who knows of none, except a covenant with death and hell, who is unconcerned about any with God? Are the children of such parents then in covenant with God? Have they then any right to baptism? No. They are excluded from it, their parents not being in covenant with him. Such was the doctrine of the church of England in Queen Elizabeth's time, and such, I doubt not, is her doctrine in the present day.

The other question and answer confirm what is here declared. "It may be demurred whether children of wicked Christians; that is of such as hold in judgment true religion, and deny it in their lives, may be baptized? *Ans.* They may: for all, without exception, that were born of uncircumcised Jews (whereof many were wicked) were circumcised."

To this reason may be added,—a person who holds the truth, though for the present he holds it in unrighteousness, may have held it with a
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pure conscience—may therefore be in covenant with God,—and may give proof of it, by returning to him with a true repentance : his children, therefore, may be received. For, if they are excluded on account of his present inconsistencies, they may be excluded unjustly: And, if we do err, it is but to err on the charitable side. But, according to the question and answer, faith in the parent, in some sense, is required, is indispensibly necessary, or his children must be absolutely excluded.

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LETTER III.

ON CONFIRMATION.

WHETHER confirmation is of divine institution, or whether St. Paul alludes to it, when he speaks of the due time "of laying on of hands" (Heb. vi. 7.) we need not now enquire. Much less are we bound to mention and examine the very fanciful opinions of different writers concerning the origin of this institution, whether human or divine. That it was customary with the Apostles to lay their hands on individuals, that they might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, is evident from many parts of the New Testament. That there was a custom very early in the Christian church, similar to what we understand by confirmation, is most certain; but, from what it was derived, I know

I know not that there is any positive proof. That the Jews are very careful of the religious education of their children, there can be no manner of doubt. Buxtorf, one of the principal Rabbis amongst the modern Jews, informs us (*Synag. Judaic. ch. vii.*) that the Jews had in every village a person called "an instructor of babes," whose office it was to teach children the law, till they were ten years of age; and from that time, till they were fifteen, they were instructed in the Talmud; and that, in general, when they are about thirteen, they were publicly examined before the assembled congregation; and if they gave a good account of their knowledge in the law, they were, from that time, called "children of the precept;" were considered as accountable for their conduct, and bound to keep the whole law.

Whether confirmation, as used in our church, was derived from this custom among the Jews, you may consider at your leisure.

Immediately after the exhortation to god-fathers and god-mothers, in the office for public baptism, the minister is directed to say to them, "Ye are to take care that this child be brought to

the Bishop to be confirmed by him; so soon as he can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, in the vulgar tongue, and be farther instructed in the Church Catechism, set forth for that purpose."

The third and fourth rubrics after the Catechism, ordain, " 3d, So soon as children are come to a competent age, and can say in their mother-tongue, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and also can answer to the other questions of this short Catechism, they shall be brought to the Bishop; and every one shall have a god-father or a god-mother, as a witness of their confirmation." 4th, And whensoever the Bishop shall give knowledge, for children to be brought to him for their confirmation, the curate of every parish shall either bring, or send in writing, with his hand subscribed thereunto, the names of all such persons, within his parish, as he shall think fit to be presented to the Bishop to be confirmed; and if the Bishop approves of them, he shall confirm them in manner following."

These words are very plain, and seem to imply, that no qualification is necessary, in the person

son to be confirmed, but to be able to say the Church Catechism. For this contains the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and whatever else is referred to in the third rubric. Accordingly, when children apply for a ticket to be confirmed, the usual and only question, in general, that is put to them, is, Can you say the Catechism? But if we attend to what is said in the preface to, and the first question in, the Office for Confirmation, we may see that much more is required.

“ To the end that confirmation may be administered to the more edifying of such as shall receive it, the church has seen good to order, that none hereafter shall be confirmed, but such as can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments; and can answer to such other questions, as in the short Catechism are contained: which order is very convenient to be observed; to the end that children being now come to the years of discretion, and having learned what their god-fathers promised for them in baptism, they may themselves, with their own mouth and consent, openly before the church, ratify and confirm the same; and also promise,

that, by the grace of God, they will evermore endeavour themselves faithfully to observe such things, as they, by their own confession, have assented to."

Then shall the Bishop say, " Do you here, in the presence of God, and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at baptism; ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and acknowledging yourselves bound to believe and to do all those things which your god-fathers, and god-mothers then undertook for you?" And every one shall audibly answer, " I do."

Here we may plainly see, that it is not sufficient, in order to confirmation, for a person to be able to *say* the Church Catechism; he must *understand* it. He must have learned what his god-fathers and god-mothers have promised for him at baptism. He must openly declare his consent to it. He must openly declare that he thinks himself bound to believe, and to do all, that they undertook for him. He must promise that he will endeavour, by the grace of God, evermore to observe such things.

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And, indeed, if it is really designed, that a person at confirmation, should take upon himself the baptismal vow; no qualification short of this, can be sufficient, in order to his being admitted to this ordinance.

The burden of the preparation for this qualification, so far as man can bestow it, certainly falls upon the minister.

The first and second rubrics after the Catechism say, "The curate of every parish shall diligently, upon Sundays and holydays, after the second lesson at evening-prayer, openly in the church, instruct and examine so many children of his parish sent unto him, as he shall think convenient, in some part of their Catechism."

"And all fathers, mothers, masters, dames, shall cause their children, servants, and apprentices (which have not learned their Catechism,) to come to the church at the time appointed, and obediently to hear, and be ordered by the curate, until such time as they have learned all that is here appointed for them to learn."

The catechizing of children is a very material part of the minister's duty, and to which every
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pious clergyman will gladly attend. And to help him in this important part of his work, it is commanded that, "all fathers, mothers, masters, dames, shall cause their children, servants, and apprentices, who have not learned their Catechism, to come to church at the time appointed, &c."

But, if parents will not attend their children, or their children will not come, who shall compel them? The clergyman has no power. Servants and apprentices would, in general, refuse to come, and scruple not to declare, that their masters have no business with them in this matter. And by what law can masters oblige them to attend? The lowest of the people are now assured, that the ecclesiastical canons never received the sanction of parliament; and that, therefore, they are no law to them. To talk of excommunication, the threatened penalty, in case children, servants, and apprentices, are not sent to church, would only make them smile or rage: and if excommunication was enforced, it would be no punishment to them, who, by choice, excommunicate themselves for months, or a year, or more, at a time.

Wheatley, on the Common Prayer, mentions,

mentions, from Strype's History of the Reformation, a very curious anecdote. "By the canons of 1571, every minister was yearly, within twenty days after Easter, to present to the Bishop, the names of all those in his parish, who had not sent their children or servants at the times appointed. And to enforce this, it was one of the articles which was exhibited, in order to be admitted by authority, that he whose child at ten years old or upwards, or his servant at fourteen or upwards, could not say the Catechism, should pay ten shillings to the poor's box." This would be a more powerful argument than excommunication: But who can enforce it?

In the country, in general, it is very difficult for a clergyman to collect children to be catechized. In country parishes, in the county in which I reside, I believe not more than one child in five is able to read. The poor complain they cannot afford to give their children learning; they must begin to work as soon as they are able to earn any thing; they want them at home. And it has been found, by frequent trials, that this complaint cannot be removed, even by providing a teacher and books for them, without any charge to

to their parents ; for their parents will still take them away so often, that, in general, they learn very little.

There is also a remarkable backwardness in parents to send their children to be catechized. I have often, from the pulpit, intreated people to send them. I have long opened my house, every Sunday, at a stated hour, for this purpose ; but out of more than a hundred that might have come there without any inconvenience, seldom more than six or eight attended. Thus circumstanced, what can a clergyman do ? And yet it is expected that he should prepare the children of his parish for confirmation—that he should ground them in the principles of religion, in the nature of the baptismal covenant, and in the nature and necessity of their personal covenanting with God.

And even when he would collect them, by public notice for this very end, to prepare them for this ordinance, he cannot get together any considerable number. Nevertheless, a few days before the day of confirmation, several will call upon him for a ticket ; one for the sake of seeing the Bishop ; another to have a holiday ; a third
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to accompany those who are going ; and perhaps, not one among them from a real desire to take upon himself his baptismal vow, as a covenant-engagement with God. If he offers to examine them, they know not how to submit to it ; if he hints that they are unqualified, they evidence that they think themselves ill-used, and have a right to be admitted.

I do not wonder that you find these among your difficulties ; they are common ; they are what every pious minister feels and laments. But, you ask, What am I to do ? My answer is, Do your duty.

What the church requires from persons, in order to their being confirmed is very plain, and cannot easily be mistaken. She requires of them to understand their baptismal vow ; to be ready from the heart to take it upon themselves ; and to promise before the congregation, that they will constantly endeavour, with God's help, to act accordingly.

All persons, therefore, offering themselves for confirmation, and not thus qualified in the judgment of charity, should be refused. To admit them, when we have reason to believe, they
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are not thus qualified, is wilfully to trifle with and abuse the ordinance.

When you have notice that there will be a confirmation in two or three months, and such a notice is generally given, preach a discourse or two upon the subject, and invite your parishioners to send to you for instruction, those of their children whom they wish to have confirmed. If they will not send them, the fault will be with themselves. If they send them, you will soon be able to learn how far they are qualified, both as to knowledge and disposition.

If you refuse those who are unqualified, you may occasion a clamour, for a time, among some ignorant, unthinking people; but you will be doing your duty. What you know to be right, to that you ought firmly to attend, and leave the event with God.

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LETTER IV.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

WE may now consider the sense of the church concerning the administration of the Lord's supper; respecting, chiefly, those who are qualified to partake of it, and whom the minister may refuse.

“What is required of those who come to the Lord's supper? To examine themselves whether they repent them truly of their former sins, stedfastly purposing to lead a new life; having a lively faith in God's mercy, through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of his death; and be in charity with all men.”

According to this, a man is not qualified to partake of the Lord's supper, who does not know himself to be a sinner, condemned by the law of

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God, and standing in need of that mercy which is held forth to sinners, through Jesus Christ—who does not rely upon it, making it the alone ground of his acceptance with God—who is not thankful for the death of Christ—who does not stedfastly purpose to live according to the will of God, and is in peace or charity with all men.

The man, then, who does not know himself to be a sinner, so as to stedfastly purpose to lead a new life; or who is ignorant of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ; or, who expects to be saved by works of righteousness which he thinks he has done or can do, is unqualified to partake of the Lord's supper.

The Homily on the sacraments, (4to edit. 1758,) remarkably confirms this reasoning. "We must certainly know that three things be requisite in him which would seemly, as becometh such high mysteries, resort to the Lord's table: That is, first, a right and worthy estimation of this mystery. Secondly, to come in a sure faith. And thirdly, to have newness and pureness of life to succeed the same. Let us do that in the Lord's commemoration which he himself did, he himself commanded, and his Apostles

Apostles confirmed. This caution or foresight if we use, then may we see those things that are requisite in the worthy receiver, whereof this was the first, that we had a right understanding of the thing itself."

A little lower, after mentioning an expression of Chrysostom, it says, "If this advertisement of man cannot persuade us to resort to the Lord's table with understanding; see the council of God in the like matter, who charged his people to teach his posterity, not only the rights and ceremonies of the passover, but the cause and end thereof: whence we may learn, that both more and perfect knowledge is required, at this time at our hands, and that the ignorant cannot with fruit and profit exercise himself in the Lord's sacraments."

"But to come nigher to the matter; St. Paul, blaming the Corinthians for the profaning of the Lord's supper, concludeth, that ignorance both of the the thing itself, and the signification thereof, was the cause of their abuse: for they came thither irreverently, not discerning the Lord's body. Ought not we then, by the motion of the wise men, by the wisdom of God, by the

fearful example of the Corinthians, to take advised heed, that we thrust not ourselves to this table with rude and irreverent ignorance, the smart whereof Christ's church hath rued and lamented this many days and years." p. 384—386.

When the minister gives warning for the celebration of the holy communion, he says, "Dearly beloved, on Sunday next, I purpose, through God's assistance, to administer to all such as shall be religiously and devoutly disposed, the most comfortable sacrament of the body and blood of Christ; to be by them received in remembrance of his meritorious cross and passion; whereby alone we obtain the remission of our sins, and are made partakers of the kingdom of Heaven. Wherefore it is our duty to render most humble and hearty thanks to Almighty God our Heavenly Father, for that he hath given his son Jesus Christ, not only to die for us, but also to be our spiritual food and sustenance in that holy sacrament. Which being so divine and comfortable a thing to them who receive it worthily, and so dangerous to them that will presume to receive it unworthily; my
duty

duty is to exhort you, in the mean season, to consider the dignity of that holy mystery, and the great peril of the unworthy receiving thereof; and so to search and examine your own consciences (and that not lightly, and after the manner of dissemblers with God,) but so that ye may come holy and clean to such a heavenly feast, in the marriage-garment required by God in holy scripture, and be received as worthy partakers of that holy table."

At the time of the celebration of the communion, the priest shall say this exhortation:

"Dearly beloved in the Lord, ye that mind to come to the holy communion of the body and blood of our Saviour Christ, must consider how St. Paul exhorteth all persons, diligently to try and examine themselves, before they presume to eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For, as the benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart, and lively faith, we receive that holy sacrament, for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood; then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us; so is the danger great, if we received the same unworthily:

for then we are guilty of the body and blood of Christ our Saviour ; we eat and drink to our own condemnation, not considering the Lord's body ; we provoke him to plague us with divers diseases and sundry kinds of death. Judge therefore yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord ; repent you truly for your sins past ; have a lively and stedfast faith in Christ our Saviour ; amend your lives, and be in perfect charity with all men ; so shall ye be meet partakers of those holy mysteries."

At the end of this last exhortation, part only of which has been transcribed, the minister was ordered by the first English communion-office, published in the year 1547, to pause awhile, to see if any withdraw themselves. But, if no one withdraw himself, then he was to go on, " Ye that do truly and earnestly repent your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking henceforth in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort."

From these passages which I have drawn out to some length, we may easily learn the sense of
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the church of England, concerning the nature and design of the Lord's supper, and the qualifications of those who alone should be admitted to the table. They are so plain, they cannot well be mistaken. And we may see, as with a sun-beam, that ignorance of the nature of the ordinance, is an effectual bar to a worthy partaking of it. And therefore, that the ignorant man ought, without any hesitation, to be excluded. Would you suffer a man, ignorant of the nature of a bond, to sign it, when you knew that if he signed it, it would be to his great disadvantage? and can you answer it to your conscience, to suffer a person to eat and to drink to his own condemnation, which you know every one does, who eats and drinks at the Lord's table, not discerning the Lord's body?

We may likewise observe the caution she uses to keep away improper persons. In the warning for the celebration of the communion, he describes the persons who alone are proper to attend, "all such as are devoutly and religiously disposed;" the end for which they are to receive it, "in remembrance of his meritorious cross and passion; whereby alone we obtain remission
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of our sins, and are made partakers of the kingdom of Heaven."

In the exhortation at the celebration of the communion, she not only cautions against, but points out the great danger of receiving unworthily; and then declares what is necessary to their worthy receiving, "Repent you truly for your sins past; have a lively and stedfast faith in Christ our Saviour; amend your lives, and be in perfect charity with all men; so shall ye be meet partakers of those holy mysteries." And as if all this was not sufficient, when the priest finds that no man withdraws, he repeats the caution and necessary qualifications, in the invitation which immediately follows, "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins," &c. and which most certainly implies, if there are any among you, who do not truly and earnestly repent of their sins, &c.—let them withdraw, and not presume to approach the table of the Lord.

I think it is scarce possible to express in plainer terms, what is required of those who would come to the Lord's supper; who ought to be admitted, and who refused. And as these are
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the declarations of that church in which every clergyman officiates, and most of them what he himself must frequently use, if in priest's orders, they ought to be his guide, his rule in this matter. He ought to be governed by them so, as to admit to the ordinance none who are not thus qualified, and to reject every one, without exception, who is not thus qualified.

But notwithstanding these things are so plain, it is supposed by many, that a clergyman cannot refuse to admit to the table, and communicate the elements to any one who offers himself. But this is a most gross mistake; for according to the Rubric, "So many as intend to be partakers of the holy communion, shall signify their names to the curate, at least sometime the day before." This is not to be done merely, as some would insinuate, that he may know how much bread and wine to provide, but for more important purposes. For the next Rubric is, "And if any of those be an open and notorious evil liver, or hath done any wrong to his neighbours by word or deed, so that the congregation be thereby offended; the curate having knowledge thereof, shall call him and advertise him, that in any
wise

wife he presume not to come to the Lord's table, until he hath openly declared himself to have truly repented, and amended his former naughty life; that the congregation may be thereby satisfied, which before were offended; and that he hath recompensed the parties, to whom he had done wrong; or at least declare himself to be in full purpose so to do, as soon as he conveniently may."

According to the 26th canon, "No minister shall in any wise admit to the receiving the holy communion, any of his cure or flock, which be openly known to live in sin notorious without repentance, nor any who have maliciously and openly contended with their neighbour, until they be reconciled."

The 27th canon says, "No minister when he celebrateth the communion, shall administer the same to any but to such as kneel, under pain of suspension; nor, under the like pain, to any that refuse to be present at public prayers, according to the orders of the church of England; nor to any that are common and notorious depravers of the Book of Common-Prayer, and administration of the sacraments, and of the orders

ders, rites, and ceremonies, therein prescribed, or of any thing that is contained in any of the articles, &c.

It is plain then from these rubrics and canons, that he has a power of refusing persons on several accounts. He may, in particular, repel notorious evil livers,—such as have done wrong to their neighbours, or live in malice or hatred; also, persons guilty of adultery, whoredom, incest, drunkenness, swearing, ribaldry, usury, or any other uncleanness and wickedness of life; depravers of the Common-Prayer Book and Thirty-nine Articles, &c.

From these plain declarations, many are constrained to own, that he has a power to refuse all persons who are chargeable with one or more of these crimes, but no others. So that, according to them, if a person gives notice to the minister, the day before the celebration of the communion, that he intends to partake of it, and the minister cannot prove him guilty of any one of the above-mentioned crimes (or a few others mentioned in the canons) he must admit him to the table, he cannot refuse him.

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But is it reasonable to suppose, that notice is to be given to the minister the day before, merely that he may enquire whether the person giving notice is chargeable with any of the above-mentioned crimes? May not a person be free from them all, and yet not qualified to approach the table of the Lord? Surely then, notice is ordered to be given, that a minister may enquire, concerning a person's fitness as well as his unfitness: Whether his views of the ordinance, and his disposition towards it are such as the church requires, as well as whether the person is a gross offender against the laws of God and man. Otherwise you may admit ignorant, impertinent, and unbelieving persons, contrary to the order of the church, and the word of God, and yet say, they are not improper persons, because they are not chargeable with one or more of the above-mentioned vices. What the church declares plainly, in any of her offices, is as much a rule to a clergyman, as any thing that is declared in any rubric or canon.

Unless you will say, that what she orders is not to be considered as a rule, or what she declares to be right and necessary, may be dispensed

penſed with, though no reaſon is aſſigned for ſuch a diſpenſation. She does not expreſſly exclude an impenitent perſon, nor an unbeliever in the mercies of God through Jeſus Chriſt; and indeed there was no occaſion for it. For, ſhe poſitively requires of thoſe who come to the Lord's ſupper, repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt: but if a perſon, who offers himſelf, is without theſe, he is without the eſſential requiſites, and therefore abſolutely diſqualified. In like manner, ſhe does not expreſſly exclude a perſon who is ignorant of the nature of the ordinance; becauſe his ignorance is a proof that he is without the eſſential requiſites, one of which is, to diſcern the Lord's body; and therefore he is abſolutely diſqualified. Yet, as a man may be free from groſs immorality, who is without the eſſential requiſites, in order to partake of the Lord's ſupper, it is certainly neceſſary that a miniſter ſhould know the ſtate of the mind of thoſe who preſent themſelves, as to their qualifications.

Befides, it was unneceſſary to exclude from the table, by an expreſs declaration, the ignorant, the impenitent, the unbeliever; becauſe, as

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knowledge, repentance, and faith, are essential requisites to a worthy receiving, no one could, with any propriety, be admitted without them. But as persons who understand the nature of the holy communion, and, in the judgment of charity, have given proofs of their repentance and faith, may turn back to folly; so if they commit any thing that is gross and offensive, they are, by the church, to be kept away till they evidence their contrition and newness of life. No doubt it is hereby meant, that they who name the name of Christ should depart from iniquity, that when they act inconsistent with their profession, as they give reason to suspect the sincerity of their faith and repentance, they should be treated as impenitents and unbelievers; that is, kept from the table.

And if the church is thus careful not to give offence by her practice, can it be supposed that she has no care to avoid offence concerning what her professed members believe? If they do not believe her avowed doctrines, how can they be said to be her members? If they believe not salvation through Jesus Christ alone, but through works of righteousness which they think

think they have done, or can do, they may as properly be called Turks, or Jews, or infidels, as members of the church of England. Besides it is plain to every attentive reader of them, that all the services in the Book of Common-Prayer, are designed for the use of believers in her doctrines, of believers in the best sense of the word. And, though others may frequently, nay generally, attend at the time of worship, they cannot properly be numbered among her real members, any more than they who attended in the Court of the Gentiles, during the service of the Temple, could be called Children of Israel.

If you hesitate to admit this, suppose, for a moment, that the notice which is ordered to be given to the minister has respect to nothing but gross immoralities. A person, then, we will imagine, presents himself to a minister, intending to communicate the next day. The minister addresses him, Pray, Sir, are you a whoremonger? No, Sir. Have you been drunk lately? No, Sir. Have you been guilty of— Oh! no Sir, no Sir, never once in my life. Very well, Sir, I do not ask you whether you under-

stand the nature of the Lord's supper ; whether you are sorry for your sins against God, and are resolved to forsake them ; or whether you have a lively faith in his mercies through Jesus Christ, with a thankful remembrance of his death—these are points there is no occasion to enquire into—I shall be happy to see you at the table to-morrow.

Would you, could you, say such a minister understood his duty ; desired to promote the best interests of his people ; was concerned for the credit of the church, or the cause of God ?

But still it is said, and insisted on, that we can exclude none but by positive law ; and therefore, if persons are not expressly excluded by positive law, and there is none for a minister to act by, but the rubrics and canons, we have no warrant to exclude them.

Upon what authority this peremptory declaration is made, I must freely declare that I neither know, nor can conceive.

But supposing that a positive law is necessary, is there none for a clergyman to act by, except the rubrics and canons ? Are not the doctrines of the church a positive law to him ? Has he
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not subscribed that they are agreeable to the word of God; and that the Book of Common-Prayer, and of ordering of bishops, priests, and deacons, containeth in it nothing contrary to the word of God, and that it may lawfully so be used, and that he himself will use the form in the book presented at the public prayer, and administration of the sacraments, and none other? Are not then these a law unto him? If he binds himself to administer them, in the manner prescribed, does he not bind himself to see that what is required in them by others, shall be attended to? Is not the word of God likewise a law unto him? That clergyman must be sadly fettered, who is tied up from acting according to his solemn engagements, and the word of God, because he has not, what he calls, a positive law, to countenance him. Could I be persuaded it was my case, I would soon endeavour to break my fetters, and at all events, act according to my conscience.

This plea of not acting according to engagements and the word of God, for want of a positive law, may do well enough for him, who is not habitually influenced by sacred things;

who regards the fleece more than the flock, and who may desire the praise of man more than the praise which cometh from God ; but, I am persuaded, it will not, cannot satisfy, a thinking conscientious person.

But what is the force of this argument for the necessity of a positive law to guide a minister in this matter ? How is it managed by its advocates ?

It has been determined, say they, in the civil courts, that if a person, in order to qualify himself for a place, presents himself at the table, and the minister refuses to administer to him, he is liable to be prosecuted. There is a case mentioned by Burn (Eccles. Law, vol. ii. p. 382. 8vo. edit.) where a minister was prosecuted for refusing the sacrament twice to the same person, and an ignorant jury brought in damages for both refusals ; but upon an arrest of judgment, the sentence was reversed ; and it was given that no one could claim an unqualified admission to the table. It may be remarked that this was very soon after the Restoration, in the year 1661, when the ecclesiastical law had been long dispensed with ; and it may be supposed, that most
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of those who served upon the jury were ignorant of it. I know of no other case, of this kind, since that year. There certainly is no statute law which commands a clergyman to give the elements to every one who may present himself at the table. To be guided, therefore, by the former part of this case, is, to appearance at least, to be guided by the law of convenience, rather than of truth and equity. A rich man may threaten and intimidate a poor clergyman, in case of refusal, and constrain him to a compliance; and the poor clergyman may think it better to comply, than be at variance with a rich parishioner, or run the hazard of a prosecution. Besides, many a clergyman may not be able to raise money enough to defend his cause, though he may be persuaded that his cause is just. Moreover, assured that there is a fashion in law, and not knowing what law is in fashion at the time, he may think it best to give up all thoughts of a suit, and bow to the rich man's purse.

But the rubrics, they say, are most certainly part of the statute law of the land; for they have been confirmed in parliament by the several acts of uniformity, in the reigns of Edward the
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sixth, Queen Elizabeth, and Charles the second; therefore they are a law to us.

I suppose if they had been confirmed by only one of the acts of uniformity, they would have been as much a part of the statute law of the land, as they are now. But, are not the Catechism, the office for the administration of the Lord's supper, and indeed the whole book of Common-Prayer, as much a part of the statute law of the land, as the rubrics? Has not the whole been confirmed by Act of Parliament? by the Act of Uniformity, in 1662? And if those require certain qualifications, in all who would come to the Lord's supper, surely they exclude from it all who have not these qualifications. The argument then from positive law amounts to nothing.

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LETTER V.

I Think we need not proceed any further in our enquiries. It may however be proper to bring together, in one view, the discoveries we have made of the mind of the church.

Concerning Baptism, her will is, before any infant is offered to be baptized, the minister shall have convenient warning given him by the parents of their wish and intention—that the parents shall wait the minister's direction, whether the child shall be brought to be baptized at the morning or the evening service—that no parents shall be admitted as sponsors for their own child—that no persons shall be admitted as sponsors unless they have received the holy communion—and that sponsors shall make no other
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answers, when the ordinance is celebrated, than what are prescribed in the Book of Common-Prayer : that infants have no right to baptism on their own account ; the right is derived from their parents. If both, or one of their parents are in covenant with God through Jesus Christ, or believers in the mercy of God held forth through a Mediator, they have a right to be baptized ; if not, they have no right, and ought not to be baptized.

With regard to Confirmation she has determined, that it is not sufficient for the person to be confirmed, to be able to *say* the Church Catechism ; but that he must *understand* it, especially that part of it which relates to the baptismal covenant : that he must see it his duty to take this on himself, and must declare before the congregation, that he does heartily take it upon himself, and will for the future, by God's grace, have respect unto all his commandments.

Concerning the Lord's Supper, it is her mind, that no one shall be admitted to it who does not understand the nature of the ordinance ; or, in the language of the Apostle, “ discern the Lord's body,”—who is not in the exercise of repentance towards

towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in peace or charity with all men. These, with her, are especial qualifications, and indispensibly necessary to a proper partaking of it. Moreover, she allows none to receive it, though he may have clear views of the Christian scheme, if he holds the truth in unrighteousness, or lives in the habitual commission of any one known sin, or in the habitual omission of any known duty.

These are most certainly her determinations. No person, therefore, should be admitted to either of these ordinances, who is not qualified according to what she demands. And it is the duty of every clergyman to look into these things, and to reject all, without exception, who are not thus qualified.

But, alas! who, in comparison, attends to them? I must confess, to my shame and confusion, that, for many years after I was ordained, I paid no regard to them. If, upon going into church, or, immediately after the second lesson, the clerk informed me there was a child to be baptized, I baptized it. Who were the sponsors, and whether they were properly qualified,

lished, I never enquired. If the parents desired me to baptize their children at home, I complied. If, after the ceremony was over, they requested my company, I generally gave it without hesitation; and often joined with them in their mirth and jollity till the midnight hour.

When a person applied for a ticket for confirmation, I freely gave it; seldom hesitated, and never refused. I have, now and then, spoke a word or two about the baptismal covenant, and told them they should take it upon themselves; but never once entered into a proper enquiry, whether the persons offering themselves to be confirmed were qualified according to what the church requires.

When the Lord's supper was administered, I scrupled not to communicate the bread and wine to all who presented themselves at the table, without previously enquiring what were their views of the nature of the ordinance, or whether their general conversation was as becometh the gospel of Jesus Christ?

This was my manner for many years. Whether I was singular in my conduct, I leave it to others

others to determine. But the practice of an individual, or even of a multitude, is to guide us no farther than it is agreeable to some standard, which is acknowledged to be the rule of duty. What is our rule, in these things, is very plain; in what manner we should act, we cannot therefore be ignorant.

Our enquiries, compared with the general practice, supply us with an awful proof, that there is a general departure from the discipline of the church. That we have long since departed from the *standard doctrines*; and that when taken in a literal and grammatical sense (which is the sense of them to which all the clergy are bound to subscribe) they are incapable of an Arian, Socinian, or Arminian construction, has been clearly demonstrated.

The constitution of the church is good, both in doctrine and discipline; but there is a departure, a general departure, from both. The people are strangers to the real doctrines and discipline of that church of which they call themselves members. And such a proof do they give of the formality and customariness of their worship, of their inattention to what they

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hear, they do not see the almost constant opposition there is in the matter of the prayers and the sermon. The former speaks the doctrines of the church, the latter, the doctrine of the preacher; the former salvation through grace alone, the latter salvation through works of our own righteousness: and yet very few, who attend the public worship in the establishment, see this. The time has been, when uniformity in doctrine was not only required of the clergy, but insisted on; and if any clergyman dared to advance any thing inconsistent with the Articles, he was sure to be called to an account for it; but now he may preach what doctrines he pleases, without the least apprehension of censure. Doctrines grossly inconsistent with the Articles, have often been preached before bishops, the appointed guardians of our church, and the preachers have passed unreprieved. Discourses have, times without number, been preached at visitations, commended, printed, and sent into the world, under the sanction of a body of men, though they have contained doctrines contrary to what they all have subscribed to be agreeable to the word of God. Nor is any order of the clergy,

clergy, even the highest, free from the charge of preaching and printing what is inconsistent with their subscription. These things are so general, so notorious, that when the people hear, from the pulpit, the doctrines of their own church, they look upon the preacher as a "fetter forth of strange doctrines," and are soon taught, by his brethren in their neighbourhood, to brand him with some opprobrious distinction. From that moment he becomes the object of slander and disrespect; is sure to be discountenanced by those who ought to protect and encourage him; and marked as an obnoxious man, one who ought not, on any consideration whatever, to be promoted. His attachment to the doctrines and discipline of the church, are a sure bar to preferment.

We have indeed reason to say with the prophet, lamenting the ruinous state of Jerusalem, "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! Lament. iv. 1. Doctrine and discipline were once regarded; they are regarded no more. Orthodoxy and diligence were the sure way to favour; they are the sure way to favour no more. Favour is reserved for those,

and for those, and those only, who have very different qualifications. The true sons of the church are, with a very few exceptions, disinherited; their patrimony is bestowed on bastards.

I do not think it uncharitable, or harsh, or even improper, to speak thus plainly, though seemingly at the expence of others. If a man in a public, an almost sacred station, is publicly charged with betraying his trust, with handling the word of God deceitfully, is not such a charge, a public call on him to justify his conduct? And if, in making his defence, he unavoidably says, what tends to criminate the conduct of others, wherein is he to blame? Besides, if the people are imposed on, are deceived, and they most certainly are, the truth ought to be held up to them. To conceal it, when it is evidently connected with their best interests, is unjustifiable, is cruel; to make it known, may deliver them from the most dangerous entanglements. Facts are valuable. It may also be useful to many of other denominations, who have not enquired into those things; and judging only from what they see,

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cry out against the established church as erroneous and corrupt. To represent the case fairly, may enable them to distinguish between what is good in theory, and reprehensible in practice; may convince them that the fault is not in the church, but in her servants. It may thus prove a good apology for her, whom multitudes through ignorance condemn.

Relaxation in discipline, was one of the first unhappy effects of the Restoration of Charles the second. It encreased and was cherished by the licentiousness of his reign. Our spiritual rulers, who ought strenuously to have opposed it, connived at, and by their connivance encouraged its growth. At the time of the Revolution, it was of such a magnitude, that all opposition was, perhaps, thought to be in vain: and this, very probably, is the true reason why no attempt has been made against it, even to this day; and now many seem interested in perpetuating it, so that a remedy is altogether hopeless.

Your way, however, is plain; and by persevering in it, you may excite a spirit of enquiry among the more candid and inquisitive of

your people, by which they may discover the true doctrines and appointed discipline of the church. This, I think, may be reasonably expected. The consequence of which must be a removal of the prejudices of some, and a constraining of them to become advocates for your opinions and practice. This will be a material point. Every instance of success of this kind, will do good; will dispel some error, and promote the knowledge of some truth. You may expect murmuring and clamour, but you will meet them in the path of duty, and, perhaps, some hot-headed person, set on by an ignorant adviser, may make a formal complaint against you in the Bishop's court. But you have nothing to fear from that quarter; for, supposing those who receive it to be unacquainted with these things (and it may be the case,) they would certainly make some enquiry before they would venture to issue a process against you; and an almost careless enquiry would convince them, that you acted properly. Or if, from any prepossession, they had had an inclination to warp justice to your inconvenience, they would not dare to indulge it. The
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spirit of the times will not bear it. Complaint, therefore, would turn to your advantage; by convincing your opposers of their weakness, and your strength. Convinced that they could not prevail, they would gradually cease from murmuring and clamour, and your difficulties would, in consequence, be gradually diminished.

I commit you to his care and keeping, who disposes of all events, and graciously accepts and rewards every sincere attempt to promote his glory.

I am, &c.

LET.

LETTER VI.

A COMPARISON, *so far as relates to RELIGIOUS WISDOM, between the English Reformers, and the Generality of the present modern Divines.*

AFTER perusing the foregoing letters, one or other may say, with a smile, all this is very true—admitting your data, we can have few objections to what you say: but—it should be remembered, that what you have advanced, is founded chiefly on rubrics, canons, and the opinions of but half-informed writers, when compared with those of our time. They were, no doubt, the best guides which could be procured in the then present day, but so great are the discoveries that have been made since that time, that we can now lay little or no stress on them.

The improvements which have been made in every branch of knowledge are wonderful; and
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by using these as helps to understand the Scriptures, we may see much farther into their true meaning, than the Reformers could possibly do.

But, if these objections are just, they are an indelible reproach upon our national religious establishment. For, if the light that was in the Reformers now proves to be darkness, and that darkness is still held up as the standard of light, what a farce is kept up under the mask of religion; and what a tendency has this to keep the people in the grossest ignorance!

The meaning of the objection, however, is obvious; the force or propriety of it may be examined.

The improvements which have been made in knowledge, since the time of the Reformation, have been chiefly in mathematics, natural philosophy in its various branches, and the arts and sciences. But I know not that these have helped us to understand our Bible better than we did before. We are able to analyze the air, and many mineral substances, but we are still unable to analyze the human heart. We can make watches go with more exactness than formerly,

ty, but I know not that we have a better idea of time or eternity. We have brought time-keepers to great perfection, but I do not perceive that we are advanced in the art of keeping our hearts, or of so numbering our days, as to apply our hearts unto wisdom. Our intellects are now so wonderfully improved, that we are able to draw the blood from the veins of one animal, and fill them with the blood of an animal of a different species; but I think we have not yet learned the art of extracting the folly that is bound up in the heart of a child, and of filling it with true wisdom. In a word, there is no connection between philosophical and theological improvement. The experience of every day convinces us, that a man may be very knowing in philosophical matters, and yet very ignorant of the Scriptures; while another may be mighty in the Scriptures, and yet a mere stranger to what is going on in the philosophical world. And if there is no connection between them, it will be impossible to prove, that improvement in the one necessarily implies, improvement in the other.

Another scheme more likely to help us forward
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in the knowledge of the Bible was the Collection of Hebrew Manuscripts, by Kennicot, and others. This undertaking was carried on for more than ten years, assisted by the most learned divines in Europe. But what has proved the consequence? After all their pains, we have no reason to change our sentiments concerning a single doctrine, relating either to faith or practice, which the Reformers advanced as the truth of God, above two hundred years ago.

Books of modern travels into the East, have enabled us to understand some parts of our Bible, much better than all our improvements in philosophy, and all the laborious researches into the different readings of the Hebrew manuscripts. By an admirable providence, the customs of the people in the East have continued very nearly the same from the times of the Patriarchs to the present day. Accordingly, the customs of the people of the East, cast much light on, and help us to understand, many passages relating to the manner of living among the ancient Patriarchs, as recorded in Scripture.

Philosophical and theological knowledge are obtained in very different ways. The former by
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the exercise of our own powers and faculties ; the latter by a divine assistance. We may, indeed, by the reading the Scriptures with care and diligence, learn from them many things that are true : but when we consider the proneness of man to “ lean to his own understanding,” instead of asking for that “ wisdom which cometh from above, and which alone is profitable to direct ;” he will soon be ready to think, that he wants no other teacher than himself ; and to lay it down as an axiom, that he ought to believe nothing, but what he can comprehend. Then all the peculiarities of the Christian scheme, which are its beauty and glory, will be given up ; its evangelical duties and precepts perverted, and the Bible changed into a system of moral philosophy. Every day convinces us, that the larger share of human learning a man has, if he sits down to explain the Scriptures, “ leaning to his own understanding,” instead of humbly depending upon a promised divine assistance, he shews he has undertaken what he has not the ability to accomplish.

God claims it as his prerogative to teach religious knowledge. Man, as his minister, may
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declare his truth, inform the understanding, settle the judgment, but cannot affect the heart. "Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but God only can give the increase." The blessing, or application of truth to the heart, is from God only; and without this, a man will never become wise unto salvation. "I will put my laws, saith God, in their understandings, and I will write them in their hearts." Heb. viii. 10. This is a promise of the covenant of grace, and is fulfilled to all to whom God shews mercy. It was indeed first made (in these words) to the Jews, Jerem. ch. xxxi. but was not intended to be confined to them. For, human nature being the same in all ages, there is the same necessity for a divine teaching, in order to attain religious knowledge, in one age as in another. Accordingly he does so, by his spirit, through his word. The first truth he usually teaches is, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Hence the object of his teaching is given to see that he is a sinner, and stands in need of the mercy of God. He has now the grand key to open the scriptures. He is now prepared to

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understand and embrace that free salvation, which is through Jesus Christ; and sensible of his depraved nature, his moral impurity, to seek after that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

When this teaching takes place, a man bows to the manifold wisdom of God, gradually embraces all the peculiarities of the Christian scheme, no longer aims to be wise above that which is written, or to substitute morality in the room of Christianity.

On this divine teaching, the English Reformers laid a great stress. Their works abound with declarations of the necessity of it, and their practice was conformable to their opinion. They admitted none to the ministry, who were not able to give some account of their having an experimental acquaintance with the leading truths of Christianity. They reasoned thus, and they reasoned wisely: How can a man be properly qualified to preach and explain the leading fundamental truths in his Bible, who has no more than a mere notion of them? Accordingly, candidates for orders were strictly examined as to those particulars; and this practice

tice continued, without any material interruption, to the time of the Usurpation. From the Usurpation, almost to the Restoration, this practice was kept up by, what were called, the Trying Ministers; or, by the ministers who were appointed to examine into the qualifications of candidates for orders, and for institution to benefices.

At the time of the Restoration, all this was laid aside; every appearance of religion was discountenanced, and every instance of profligacy cherished. Then, as if religion was a crime, and it was determined to have nothing to do with it, two thousand of the most serious ministers in the church were ejected from their employs, and forbid to officiate in sacred things. Then vice reigned and triumphed at court, and through the nation, under the example of an abandoned monarch, a greater profligate than ever disgraced a gallows.

No wonder then, that among the better sort, who could not give up their consciences in compliment to custom, great changes took place. The strict examination of candidates for orders, was no more. The strict attention to the Arti-

cles of the church, as the established rule of faith, was laid aside. Every thing was now to be understood with a great degree of latitude. And thus, by one act, a door was opened to opinions of every kind. This was called candour, charity; and was much countenanced by several men of very respectable characters, who formed themselves into a society, and called themselves Latitudinarians.

It is worth the attention of every sensible man, that about this time, a remarkable change took place in the opinions and practice of men, concerning the means necessary to be used, in order to obtain philosophical and theological knowledge. Till now, little had been admitted in religious matters, which was not experimental; but a hearty assent was given to schemes of natural philosophy, though founded only on hypothetical reasoning. Now little was to be admitted in natural philosophy, which was not founded on experiment: but, in religious matters, conjecture and analogical reasoning were substituted in the room of it. A proof this of the great wisdom, or rather folly, of our Philosophers and Latitudinarians, to admit nothing
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as true, in what related chiefly to matters of curiosity; and to content themselves with conjecture, and analogical reasoning, in what concerned their everlasting interests. And the same wisdom, or folly, has discovered itself in our practice to the present day. Experimental religion is exploded, as delusive, enthusiastic, dangerous. Every advocate for it is esteemed a man of a weak understanding, if not beside himself. And, as to the ancient custom of making enquiries concerning it, of candidates for the ministry, I suppose there has not been a single instance of the kind for a century past. But, experience is as necessary to theological as to philosophical knowledge. It is indeed, indispensibly necessary to the former. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given us." Rom. v. 5. Is it possible that the truth of this declaration of the Apostle should be ascertained without an inward experience? Is it possible for a man to know whether he sanctifies the Lord God in his heart, and makes him his fear, and him his dread,—to know whether he prefers him to the creature, and

takes him for his chief good,—which are commanded duties—without acknowledging an inward experience? Setting aside, therefore, an inward experience, how is it possible for a man to know that he is a Christian?

But this cautious, philosophical spirit, instead of promoting, tends to prevent all improvement in theological wisdom. It tends to make a man “lean to his own understanding,” contrary to the express command of God. It tends to make him receive nothing as theological truth, but what he can clearly comprehend. It causes him to neglect the great appointed means of obtaining religious truth: *viz.* to ask with a child-like simplicity, for the promised teachings of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, we find, that where this spirit prevails, our own reason is held up as the standard of all religion, and whatever cannot be brought to bow to that, is rejected. No wonder then, that where this spirit reigns, all the great peculiarities of the Gospel are renounced, and often with disdain. And when it is answered, that they are not, and were never designed to be the objects of reason, but of faith; that they are above our
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comprehension—mysterious—a loud laugh is perhaps excited, at the mere intimation of mysteries in religion. It is immediately asked, Is not the Bible a revelation of God, designed for the instruction in his will, of every one into whose hands it shall come? It is not therefore necessary that it should be level to the capacity of every one; plain, intelligible. Can this be consistent with mysteries? That the Bible is a revelation of the will of God, and designed for the instruction of all into whose hands it shall come, is most certain; but it is no where declared that we are able to understand it without the help of another teacher. If we would receive the benefits, or sound wisdom, it is intended to convey, we must apply unto God for instruction, who reserves it as his prerogative to teach effectually. It is upon this condition only, that we may expect to understand, so as to become wise unto salvation by it; that we seek unto God for help. Upon no other condition have we any reason to expect, that we shall profit by any revelation of his will which he has made.

We may now enquire, whether there are any
 mysteries

mysteries in religion ; and if there are, whether they can answer any useful purpose ;

Concerning the fact, we must be guided entirely by the testimony, or word of God, the revealer.

The Scriptures abound with the word. "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God. Mark iv. 11. For, I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceit." Rom. xi. 25. "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery." 1 Cor. ii. 7. "Behold, I shew you a mystery ; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." 1 Cor. xv. 51. "Having made known unto us the mysteries of his will according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself." Ephes. i. 9. "How that by revelation he made known unto us the mystery ; as I wrote afore in few words, whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." iii. 3, 4. "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery." v. 9. "This is a great mystery ; but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Ephes. v. 32. "And for me, that

that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel." Ephes. vi. 19. "To the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ," Coloss. ii. 2. "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." 1 Tim. iii. 9. "And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, &c." v. 16. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right-hand, and the seven golden candlesticks." Rev. i. 20. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets." Rev. x. vii.

In these Scriptures we have not only the word mystery; but—the kingdom of God—the wisdom of God—the resurrection from the dead—God's calling of the Gentiles—the union of Christ and his church—the Gospel—the revelation concerning God the Father and Christ—faith—goodness—the incarnation of the Word—are all declared to be mysteries. And if God, in his word, uses the expression, and calls many things

things by this name, who is he that shall dare to open his mouth, and say, there are no mysteries in Christianity? What is this, but to contradict, to blaspheme, and to give God the lie?

But, what is not only pertinent, but remarkable, ministers of the gospel are expressly called stewards of the mysteries of God. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

1 Cor. iv. 1. That is, according to modern theological wisdom, stewards of the no-mysteries of God. To such ridiculous absurdities are persons frequently driven, who are determined to be wise above that which is written.

But it may be asked, What are we to understand by the word mystery? If we carefully attend to the above-mentioned Scriptures, we may see it means something that was hid with God; and which could not have been known, unless he had pleased to reveal it; and which, when it is revealed, cannot be fully comprehended. In this sense of the word, all the peculiarities of the Christian scheme are mysteries.

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But can there be any use in having mysteries in religion? What good purpose can they answer? They may teach us to bow to the "manifold wisdom" of God; and give us to see that he is wiser than we are. We aimed to be wise without his teaching, and he hereby demonstrates that our wisdom is folly; that we must be saved upon a plan, which it could never have entered into the heart of man to conceive. They teach us to admire his goodness in employing that wisdom for our recovery, of which, without a revelation from himself, we could not possibly have had the least idea; and so to draw our hearts to him with gratitude and love.

They draw us off from "leaning to our own understanding," being convinced that God is wiser than we are, and to look to him for instruction; and thus to take our own place, and give honour to God, by depending upon him for that "sound wisdom which he has laid up for the righteous."

They lead us to the study of the Scriptures, and in consequence to an increasing knowledge of the character of God, and of his glorious
 excel-

excellencies and perfections. Seeing a beauty and glory in the plan of redemption through Jesus Christ, we are drawn to study the peculiarities of Christianity with an increasing desire; from a full persuasion, that, though they are mysterious and unfathomable, yet they will reward our search, with a discovery of hidden treasures.

Another consequent advantage is, that "beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory;" and that "grace and peace are multiplied unto us through the knowledge of God, and of Christ Jesus our Lord." Hence we become not only wiser, but better, and more happy, even in this life.

These are some of the blessed advantages of having mysteries in religion, and of endeavouring to make a proper use of them.

We may add, that between all the grand peculiarities of religion, there is an inseparable connection. They all stand or fall by each other. If you can prove that either of them is false, the others cannot be supported. If you can establish one of them, the truth of the others is fixed,

fixed as on a rock. Thus, the doctrine of salvation through grace, or "being justified freely, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"—of the divinity of Jesus Christ—of the doctrine of the Trinity—all stand or fall together. If salvation is this grace, then there is a necessity that the Saviour should be God, in the proper sense of the word; otherwise he could not merit for the salvation of sinners; considering that he had to make satisfaction to a being of infinite dignity.

If the Saviour is God, then there must be more persons in the Godhead than one—one, to whom satisfaction for sin was to be made; another, who was to make it. But you will say, this is only to establish a duality, not a trinity of persons. True. But it prepares the way for the proof of the latter, by obliging us to attend to what is said concerning the personality, office, and divinity of the Holy Ghost; and by attending to it with reverence and impartiality, to see that he is God upon the same grounds with the Father and Son. Do not think to overturn all this, by repeating the senseless cavil, that three cannot be one, and

one cannot be three. Remember, we are speaking of God, and therefore should speak with reverence. We are speaking of the manner of his existence; of which we could not possibly have had the least idea, if he had not revealed it unto us.

It is no where said, that three persons are one *person*; but, that three persons are *one God*.

Read this again and again, and think seriously upon it. Thus the Jehovah Elohim, with his Word and Spirit, are the Trinity of the Old Testament; as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are the Trinity of the New.

On the other hand, overturn the doctrine of the Trinity, and Christ cannot be God, in the proper sense of the word; because then there can be but one person in the Godhead. And if you talk then of "salvation through grace," you talk down-right nonsense; because no one can be found of sufficient dignity and merit, to make satisfaction to God, and to redeem the souls of men. You may talk of God's pardoning freely without a satisfaction; but this is to make him deny himself, to act inconsistently with

with what he has revealed of his nature and perfections, and what he has solemnly declared that he will do. Acknowledging then, that man is a sinner, you must be reduced to some scheme of salvation by works." Prepare then, O sinner, to meet thy God in judgment!

We may now with reverence, and prostration of spirit, cry, "Who can find out God to perfection? Oh! the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Rom. iv. 33—36.

If then, as we may have seen, there is no proper connection between philosophy and divinity, if all the boasted improvements in philosophy have not given us a clearer idea of one doctrine in our Bible, relating either to faith or practice; and this is indisputably true.—Surely we have no reason to look up to it as a guide

in theological studies. And when we consider it encourages a spirit inconsistent with the command of God, and tempts us to neglect the alone mean of improvement, which God has appointed; instead of cherishing, we have reason to avoid, to flee from it.

When the Apostle perceived how the Gnostics (the knowing ones in his time) endeavoured to incorporate their philosophy, the fooleries of that day, with the doctrines of the Gospel; it was not without reason that he cried out, "Beware, lest any man spoil you by philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Coloss. ii. 8. And surely, when we consider the awful blasphemies which have been published, concerning the person and offices of Jesus Christ, by the encouragement of a philosophic spirit, in the present day, we may see abundant reason to use the same exclamation.

But though this spirit is encouraged by the generality, thanks be to God, it is not encouraged by all. There are multitudes in the establishment, and among the dissenters, who see the danger and folly of it, and adhere to the good,

good old plan, of looking to God for his promised teaching, by his Spirit, through his word; and who evidence the blessed effects of it in their lives and conversation.

If we now ask, who are the wisest; they, who follow God's appointed way; or they, who, neglecting this, follow their own way? The answer is plain and obvious.

We only add: The English Reformers followed the former; the generality of modern divines adhere to the latter.

T H E E N D.

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